

## **Gamaliel's Wisdom**

Pastor Joseph Clark – May 29, 2020

“Leave these men alone! Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. <sup>39</sup> But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God.”

– Gamaliel

“Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction. Saint John's Gospel describes that event in these words: “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should ... have eternal life” (John 3:16).

– Pope Benedict XVI

Shortly after Jesus ascended into heaven, the Apostles continued his ministry and went throughout Jerusalem performing miraculous healings and preaching the resurrection and divinity of Jesus Christ. The local Hebrew authorities seized them for heresy against their Jewish laws and traditions and threw them into jail. The Apostles were facing possible torture and execution, for Jesus had been scourged and crucified, and the Apostles were preaching in the name of Jesus Christ. The next day, the Apostles Peter, John, and a man they healed, were brought before the Jewish elders and high council. When they were challenged about the alleged heresy, Peter proceeded to lecture and rebuke the high council, refusing to discontinue preaching in the name of Jesus Christ. This infuriated the high council who wanted to have the men put to death. What happens next is documented in the passage of scripture below:

\*Acts 5:34-39 New International Version (NIV)

34 But a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law, who was honored by all the people, stood up in the Sanhedrin and ordered that the men be put outside for a little while. 35 Then he addressed the Sanhedrin: “Men of Israel, consider carefully what you intend to do to these men. 36 Some time ago Theudas appeared, claiming to be somebody, and about four hundred men rallied to him. He was killed, all his followers were dispersed, and it all came to nothing. 37 After him, Judas the Galilean appeared in the days of the census and led a band of people in revolt. He too was killed, and all his followers were scattered. 38 Therefore, in the present case I advise you: Leave these men alone! Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. 39 But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God.”

Over 2,000 years later there are 2.3 Billion Christians in the World. Gamaliel's argument requires no elaboration. If it was not of God. It would have failed.

Reflection: Does Gamaliel's argument make sense? If all previous religious uprisings in Rome failed as they were not of God, what does that say about Christianity sustaining itself to present day as the world's largest faith? Was Gamaliel compelled to advocate for the Apostles by wisdom or by The Holy Spirit?

Wikipedia defines God as follows: “**God** is often conceived as the Supreme Being and principal object of faith. In theism, God is the creator and sustainer of the universe. In deism, God is the creator (but not the sustainer) of the universe. In pantheism, God is the universe itself.”

Recorded history is widely referred to as beginning when writing was invented by the Sumerians around 6000 years ago (although North American and Australian aborigines claim to have been passing history from one generation to the next for tens of thousands of years by way of story-telling).

According to historians since the beginning of recorded history there are approximately 2,870 different deities. However, this is a very rough estimate and only goes back to 4,000 B.C., so it does not take into account how many various Gods were worshipped prior to that time. Also, if we include the fact that in

Hinduism the entire living Universe represents a manifestation of Ishvara, this could lead to the conclusion that there are 330 million gods or goddesses. This considers Monotheism, Judaism, Christianity, Muslim, Greek, Roman, Norse, Hindu, Various Chinese, Shinto, Celtic, Egyptian, Sumerian, Babylonian, Persian, Aboriginal, etc. Mormon's worship millions of God's since they believe that God the merciful creator, was in fact himself, created. And they believe that those who achieve the highest level of their doctrine, become gods over their own world's. None of this is Biblical. Jehovah witness believe in one God, God the Father. No trinity. They believe that Jesus was originally the Archangel Michael, which is a fabrication and also, not supported Biblically.

In the world today there are approximately 2.3 billion Christians, of which roughly 2/3rds are Roman Catholic. There are 1.5 billion Muslims, 900 million Hindus, 350 million Buddhists, 28 million Sikhs, 14 million Jews, and this accounts for only a small number of the world's religions. Christianity is presently growing fastest in Africa and Asia. In Latin America, Pentecostal church growth is now four times that of Catholicism. Daily headlines report that immigration in the Western World is increasing the non-Christian population. However, this dynamic is not new. If you look at a global trend heat map of Christianity and other faiths since the resurrection of Christ, you will see that it is ever-shifting in it's sprawl, and in some cases such as South Korea where the growth erupted as quickly as did the Christian conversions at Pentecost. Where the Holy Spirit deems it, a large population growth of Christians occurs. 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of South Korea's population is Christian, and it represents one of the most vibrant Pentecostal communities in the World today.

Religions are accused of corruption, greed, hypocrisy, conspiracy, and being the cause of war and murder. When I do online ministry and I field questions or I am engaged in apologetics with atheists, their response ranges from fence sitting curiosity, to bold aggressive attacks on faith, to disgust as they are threatened by faith.

For some their relationship with God is a very personal matter. For others it is a very public celebration as a church going community. Many turn their backs on religion or their own faith when disheartened by misfortune or tragedy, and yet to whom do they pray when they experience turbulence on an aircraft, prepare to go into surgery, or wait to hear back from that job interview they so badly need?

Religion, it would seem, is heavily preoccupied with belief, faith, worship, and dogma. Yet if we take a look around us, everything we see, hear, smell, touch, and taste is evidence of God the Creator's all-powerful design. All matter including our own bodies, this earth, our galaxy, and the entire universe began by way of His will, out of nothingness.

There is only one who is proven to have performed the signs prophesied about him. Only one who was tortured, suffered, and died for his people as foretold in writing about him. Only one who was witnessed by thousands to have been resurrected and preached for 40 days before ascending into heaven. Only one whose story is told not just by witnesses who were his disciples but whose ministry and works are corroborated by non-religious historians, and who is even documented by his ancient Hebrew detractor's who discredit him by describing his miracles as "Black Magic." Even his enemies declare that he performed miracles! God the Son in the Flesh. The Son of God. Our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

The Holy Spirit tells us in the word:

"And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." (Matthew 16:18) ESV

"And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself."

(John 12:32) ESV

"For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ." (1 Corinthians 3:11) ESV

"So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied." (Acts 9:31) ESV

“Not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.” (Hebrews 10:25) ESV

“And at the proper time manifested in his word through the preaching with which I have been entrusted by the command of God our Savior; To Titus, my true child in a common faith: Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior. This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you— if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, ...” (Titus 1:3-11 ESV)

“And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.” (Philippians 1:6) ESV

“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.” (John 12:24) ESV

“As they went on their way through the cities, they delivered to them for observance the decisions that had been reached by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem. So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and they increased in numbers daily.” (Acts 16:4-5) ESV

Is it possible that there is more than one way to salvation? After all, there are so many religions to choose from. If you believe that Jesus was a liar, then you can choose to believe this and cobble together your own multi faith approach. But you will not be saved. God tells us through the scriptures, through the Gospels, and in his own words, that there is only one way, truth, and life. There is only one door, one path, one good shepherd, and that salvation is found in no one else but Jesus Christ. The Word further tells us, that we either accept Christ exclusively, or we have not chosen to receive his salvation and live in accordance with the Gospels.

The Bible does not say Christ is the way, but so is Buddha, Mohammed, Vishnu, etc. The Word does not say anything about The Koran or the Bhagavat Gita. What the Bible does say is:

<sup>2</sup>” Do not add to or subtract from these commands I am giving you. Just obey the commands of the LORD your God that I am giving you.” (Deuteronomy 4:2) New Living Translation (NLT)

<sup>12</sup>”Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12) New International Version (NIV)

We are called to obedience by our omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient God. A God to be loved, obeyed, feared, and devoted to exclusively.

It begs the question if Christianity survived and flourished over the centuries, what does this say about the other religions that are also seeing growth? Jesus warns us in the Word:

“Be careful that no one misleads you,” returned Jesus, “for many men will come in my name saying, ‘I am christ’, and they will mislead many. You will hear of wars and rumours of wars—but do not be alarmed. Such things must indeed happen, but that is not the end. For one nation will rise in arms against another, and one kingdom against another, and there will be famines and earthquakes in different parts of the world. But all that is only the beginning of the birth-pangs. For then comes the time when men will hand you over to persecution and kill you. And all nations will hate you because you bear my name. Then comes the time when many will lose their faith and will betray and hate each other. Yes, and many false prophets will arise, and will mislead many people. Because of the spread of wickedness, the love of most men will grow cold, though the man who holds out to the end will be saved. This good news of the kingdom will be proclaimed to men all over the world as a witness to all the nations, and the end will come.” (Matthew 24:5)

<sup>15</sup>”Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.” Matthew 7:15 King James Version (KJV)

God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is our authority. The Word is our authoritative standard, and The Word tells us repeatedly, that in all things, we are advised time and again that our salvation is in Christ and Christ alone. That he brings all things together for the good of those who love him. Let us have complete faith that no matter what ails us, no matter what befalls us, no matter how disheartening the state of the world is, no matter how many of our own religious leaders fall prey to the enemy, and in doing so sin or perform evil, let us have absolute faith in God, and know that his plan for us is for the long game. The betterment and salvation of eternal souls.

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